

2007

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Citation of this paper:

Srivastava, P. (2007). Neither voice nor loyalty: school Choice and the low-fee private Sector in India. Research Publications Series, Occasional Paper No. 134. National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education, Columbia University, New York.

Neither Voice nor Loyalty: School Choice and the Low-Fee Private Sector in India

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(2007)

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. First, it presents a model examining the school choice processes of disadvantaged households accessing the LFP sector in a study on Lucknow District, Uttar Pradesh. The model presents households in the study as engaging in ‘*active choice*’. Active choice is seen as the deliberated action of households in making concerted choices about their children’s schooling through a complex process. The process involved assessing competing school sectors (mainly the state and LFP), and analyzing particular household circumstances and local school markets through a *systemic set* of values, beliefs, and “mental models” (North, 1990) about education. Second, it focuses on the adept employment of engagement strategies specific to the LFP sector by households in the study to interact with their chosen schools. Since the schooling arena is heavily marketised, household behavior was expected to follow Hirschman’s (1970) classic “exit, voice, and loyalty” framework. However, contextual specificities of the LFP sector necessitated a re-examination of this framework when applied here.

SETTING THE SCENE

Reported deterioration in the quality of public schooling in many economically developing countries has resulted in increased private provision (De, Majumdar, Noronha & Samson, 2002; Glick & Sahn, 2006; Tooley & Dixon, 2005). Especially striking is that increasing marketisation and privatization are not limited to changes in schooling provision for middle or elite classes, but in an increasing number of countries, are leading to the emergence of private schools for lower income groups (e.g. Alderman, Orazem & Paterno, 2000; Bangay, 2005; Tooley & Dixon, forthcoming; Rose, 2005). The mushrooming of what have been termed here, '*low-fee private*' (LFP) schools in India for socially and economically disadvantaged groups is one such phenomenon. Its significance as a private sector targeted to a clientele with traditionally low participation in schooling is crucial in understanding the changing schooling choices of a group that has been marginalized in dominant educational research.

This study takes its cue from Stromquist's (1999) call for in-depth analyses of how schooling decisions are made within households, since it is the primary site affecting educational access. While the heterogeneity of private schooling in India has been noted (Aggarwal, 2000; De et al., 2002; Majumdar & Vaidyanathan, 1995; Tilak & Sudarshan, 2001; Tooley & Dixon, 2005), there is a dearth of research on the household schooling behaviors of disadvantaged groups who access the LFP sector. Balagopalan (2004) stresses that underpinning Indian educational discourse are the middle classes' ideological constructions of disadvantaged communities favoring child labor over schooling. Such rhetoric portrays these groups either as "vulnerable" and likely to be "duped" by LFP schools (Singh, 1995), or as "irresponsible" (e.g. Banerji, 2003; Government of India, 2002, p. 86). From this perspective, disadvantaged groups are characterized as disinterested in schooling, ignorant of its benefits and, when faced with limited resources, unwilling to send their children to school.

Within this context, the purpose of this paper is two-fold. Firstly, it presents a model examining the school choice processes of disadvantaged households accessing the LFP sector in a study on Lucknow District, Uttar Pradesh. The model presents households in the study as engaging in ‘*active choice*’. Active choice is seen as the deliberated action of households in making concerted choices about their children’s schooling through a complex process. The process involved assessing competing school sectors (mainly the state and LFP), and analyzing particular household circumstances and local school markets through a *systemic set* of values, beliefs, and “mental models” (North, 1990) about education.

Secondly, it focuses on the adept employment of engagement strategies specific to the LFP sector by households in the study to interact with their chosen schools. Since the schooling arena is heavily marketised, household behavior was expected to follow Hirschman’s (1970) classic “exit, voice, and loyalty” framework. However, contextual specificities of the LFP sector necessitated a re-examination of this framework when applied here.

Following a presentation of the research strategy, the paper reframes the context for LFP school choice in India, presents the school choice model for households in the study, and outlines the engagement strategies they used to interact with chosen LFP schools.

RESEARCH STRATEGY

Uttar Pradesh is classed as one of the most “educationally backward” states in India, with a literacy rate of 57.4%, placing it 31st of 35 states and territories (Government of India, 2001). At the same time, it is estimated to have the second highest distribution of private school enrolments in elementary education in the country at 57.6% (Panchamukhi & Mehrotra, 2005, p. 236). Despite its reported pervasiveness

(Aggarwal, 2000; De et al., 2002; Majumdar & Vaidyanathan, 1995; Tooley & Dixon, 2005), the new private sector accessed by disadvantaged groups has neither been officially defined by the state nor operationally defined by researchers.

For the purposes of this study, the LFP sector was defined as occupying a part (often unrecognized) of the highly heterogeneous private unaided sector¹. LFP schools were further defined as those that: saw themselves targeting disadvantaged groups, were entirely self-financing through tuition fees, and charged a monthly tuition fee not exceeding about one day's earnings of a daily wage laborer at the primary and junior (elementary) levels, and about two days' earnings at the high school and intermediate (secondary) levels.

Data collection roughly spanned one school-year, and was conducted from July 2002 to April 2003. Household-level results presented here are part of a larger household, school, and state level case study on LFP schooling in Lucknow District (Srivastava, 2005; 2006). The specific methods for data collection and sources of evidence at the household level are presented below.

Focus Schools

One urban and one rural focus school was chosen from the 10 case study schools (five urban and five rural) for more concentrated ethnographic-style study. Focus schools were chosen on the basis that they were deemed to be the best competitors of each group; having secured the largest enrolments and facing direct competition from multiple LFP and state schools in their immediate vicinity. At the household level, the rationale was that focus schools would provide a pool of household interviewees who could best articulate their decisions about private schooling, perceptions of their chosen school, and why that school was chosen over competing ones.

Interviews

Household

Data presented here were collected through semi-structured interviews with 60 parents (or close family members where appropriate), 30 each from the two focus LFP schools. Household interviews were conducted by the researcher in Hindi on school premises in a private area, and lasted 30-45 minutes. The interview schedule comprised questions on: household socio-economic background, family composition, and educational profiles; factors influencing choice and decision-making processes regarding private schooling; perceptions about chosen schools; and the level of school-responsiveness and voice at the school. Questions on household and educational profiles were structured, which allowed the collection of quantitative data about participants. These data were used to better contextualize interviewees' responses as a group and identify schooling patterns within it.

School

The 10 formal school interviews informing results at the household level were the second of three sets of interviews with each school. The interviews of interest here addressed schools' assessments of the educational needs of their target group, strategies for responsiveness, and parental participation (school strategies; perceptions of involvement). They were conducted in Hindi by the researcher on school premises and averaged at 60 minutes.

Numerous informal interviews were conducted throughout the 10-month period with owners/principals to reduce the "artificiality" of formal interview settings (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 140). They provided the opportunity to follow-up on observation events or formal interviews over time, and in an atmosphere where

owners/principals were more comfortable in giving details on privileged or sensitive information (e.g. school income), or as a forum to elaborate on their thoughts.

Non-Participant Observation

Data on household engagement strategies were further collected through school observations of parent-owner/principal interactions over the 10-month period. Observations for this purpose were primarily conducted at focus schools in the principal's office during the break between shifts in the urban school, and near the end of the school day at the rural school. These were the times when and “social places” (Simpson & Tuson, 1995, p. 23) where parents most commonly approached schools.

School Documents

Student records and documents on information dissemination to parents were analyzed. These included attendance and enrolment records, letters or notices to parents, and school diaries.

REFRAMING SCHOOL CHOICE FOR THE INDIAN CONTEXT

There is a need to contextualize school markets (Waslander & Thrupp, 1997), and frame the overall institutional parameters within which choice is operating in India. Firstly, unlike the USA or UK, school choice as a “policy that is designed to reduce the constraints that current school configurations place on schools and students” (Goldhaber, 1999, p. 16), is not applicable. This is because the system of catchments dictating public school allocation does not exist in principle, however, it may be that most parents who send their children to state schools do so based on distance. According to most State and Central Government regulations, most government schools

are not to deny admission to any child who wishes to be enrolled.² Therefore, in principle, parents have a choice of which school to access.

Secondly, similar to the USA and UK where privileged parents have had the freedom to choose private schooling for their children (Ball, 2003; Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995; Golhaber, 1999; Power, Edwards, Whitty, & Wigfall, 2003), the same has long existed for the upper middle class and elite in India. However, the use of private schooling by parents from lower middle-class and disadvantaged groups marks the need to examine changing school choice behaviors. The change seems to be linked, at least partly, to an increase in the heterogeneity of private schooling provision by fee level (Srivastava, 2006; Tilak & Sudarshan, 2001). Thus, new analyses on disadvantaged households' schooling behaviors should focus on choices between the public and private sectors among this group.

Finally, increased choice for disadvantaged groups does not come from voucher programs as in some countries (e.g. Chile) or the alleviation of catchment rules in others (e.g. USA or UK), but from increased private provision. As Carnoy (2000) notes: "When choice is about privatization, we need to know much more about how such an educational system would look" (p. 15). In effect, school choice in the current Indian context must be analyzed through a distinction of different choice systems.

The distinction between what Tooley (1997) describes as "choice_s", the system where parental choice exists within heavy state regulations, funding, and school provision; or "choice_m", choice between competing suppliers, with an opening of the supply-side reducing state monopoly in supply and funding, can be useful here. According to results of this study, even though LFP schools (like other private unaided schools), were heavily regulated in principle and should have activated the system of choice_s, in practice, it was enacted through choice_m even for disadvantaged groups. That

is, LFP school choice is operating within a rapidly expanding array of private schools that are independent of state funding and management, and operate through their own informal set of rules and operational mechanisms (see Srivastava, 2007). However, current understandings of school choice in India have not yet incorporated this changing context.

Mind the Gap: Current Understandings of School Choice

Much of the literature on school choice has been developed in economically advantaged countries (e.g. Belfield & Levin, 2005; Fusarelli, 2003; Gewirtz et al., 1995; Power et al., 2003; Waslander & Thrupp, 1997). This makes it difficult to analyze the private school choices of traditionally excluded groups in economically developing countries. Apart from studies on voucher programs (Gauri & Vawda, 2004; McEwan & Carnoy, 2000; Mizala & Romaguera, 2000) less relevant to public/private sector school choice in the absence of government programs or private subsidies, literature on school choice in economically developing countries is limited (e.g. Alderman et al., 2001; Glewwe & Jacoby, 1994; Glick & Sahn, 2006), particularly in the private sector.

The majority of existing literature on private schooling in economically developing countries examines the public-private mix of provision and delivery (Jimenez, Lockheed, & Wattanawaha, 1988; Jimenez, Lockheed, Luna, & Paqueo, 1989; James, 1993; James, King, & Suryadi, 1996), comparative achievement (Cox & Jimenez, 1991; Jimenez, Lockheed, & Paqueo, 1991; Kingdon, 1996), or educational expenditure and financing (Ebel, 1991; Bray, 1996; Patrinos & Ariasingam, 1997). More recently, some studies in the Indian context have contemplated the possibility of the private sector meeting increased educational demand in view of *Education for All* goals (De et. al, 2002; Mehrotra et al., 2005; Tilak & Sudarshan, 2001). However, a serious engagement with the

concept of ‘school choice’ is lacking in the academic discourse of economically developing countries.

In its starkest form, choice in the context of individualism and liberal market reforms is based on an extension of the concept of *homo economicus*, conceiving of the parent as a rational thinking individual operating in an ‘open’ education system for self-interest. In their critique, David, Davies, Edwards, Reay, and Standing (1997) outline that choice, from this perspective, can be thought to involve various rational stages which are applied to the selection of a school:

- (1) possibilities are identified and separated out as ‘different’ and distinctive from one another;
- (2) information is acquired about each different option so that they can be evaluated one against another, and against previously held criteria; and
- (3) this rational appraisal leads to the selection of one option as the ‘choice’ (p. 399).

Of course, choice is a much more complicated process. Studies in the USA and the UK have examined complications in choice-making arising from issues such as incomplete information (e.g. Schneider & Buckley, 2002; Schneider, Teske & Marschall, 2000); confounding race and class factors (e.g. Henig, Hula, Orr, & Pedescleaux, 1999; Gewirtz et al., 1995; Tedin & Weihr, 2004; Wells & Serna, 1996); and different political contexts and choice programs (Belfield & Levin, 2005; Fusarelli, 2003; Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998). However, the current analytic on household decision-making processes and schooling choices of disadvantaged parents in economically developing countries lacks serious engagement of these and other potentially relevant issues.

For instance, a much cited study on school choice in Ghana (Glewwe & Jacoby, 1994) showed that higher quality schools (regarding certain school characteristics) were attractive to parents. The researchers reported that repairing leaking classrooms

produced the greatest increase in test scores, but investments in school libraries or reducing travel time by building more schools yielded only modest increases. They explained this seemingly contra-intuitive result by stating that: “If parents choose schools based on their attributes, then these attributes are endogenous in an educational production function; any positive choice association between school quality and cognitive skills...may simply be due to the fact that more motivated students go to better schools” (Glewwe & Jacoby, 1994, p. 844). However, as Lloyd, Mensch and Clark (2000) astutely note, such analyses ignore “...those aspects of schooling that are most conducive to encouraging initial enrolment and retention” (p. 113).

Households in this study chose LFP schools partly on their assessments of what constituted ‘good schools’ on indicators which were sometimes contrary to accepted educational research. For example, large class sizes in LFP schools were often cited as an indicator of good schooling because, to these households, they indicated school popularity. Household participants interpreted this as a sign that schooling must be ‘good’, which encouraged both initial enrolment and retention in a particular LFP school. Thus, it could be that in the Ghanaian case above, fixing a leaky roof had more impact on achievement not (only) because more motivated students went to better schools, but because it motivated greater retention or enrolment by targeting a measure of quality in that school type that parents perceived to be important. Such examples may point to the endogenous nature of school choice, not only in achievement, but in initial enrolment and retention related to perceived quality.

In Alderman et al.’s (2001) study on public/private schooling choices of low-income households in Pakistan, 37 percent of children were enrolled in private schools among families in the lowest income bracket (less than Rs. 2000/month) surveyed in Lahore. Of all children in that income bracket, a slightly higher proportion of girls was enrolled in private schools (37 percent) compared to boys (35 percent). They contend

that schooling choices of poor parents are affected by fee level, school proximity, and quality. However, Alderman et al. do not examine the process households followed to arrive at this contra-intuitive finding, or how parents interacted with their chosen school to maintain or later change that choice. Similarly, in their study on Madagascar, Glick & Sahn (2006) find that school choice was related to quality and negatively to multi-grade teaching and poor facilities, but there is no analysis on household choice processes.

Although such studies provide a useful starting point for outlining potential factors influencing resulting school choices, they fall short of analyzing the *processes* through which schooling decisions are made within households, and further, how households interact with their chosen schools once the choice is made. The analysis here aims to fill that gap from a different starting point.

Apple (2004) reminds us that the focus on school choice should be more comprehensive to include “a *systemic quality*, a set of values, skills, dispositions, and propensities that enables certain groups to employ educational reforms for their own and individual collective benefit” (p. 396). Approaching the analysis of disadvantaged groups and their engagement with private schooling in this manner allows one to ask the question: ‘Is there a systemic set specific to disadvantaged groups in India allowing them to employ LFP schooling for their individual and collective benefit, and if so how does it work?’ The engagement of disadvantaged groups with the newly emerging LFP sector underscores the need to examine results in this study from such a perspective, and to ascertain whether, like middle-class parents in the UK or socially advantaged groups in the USA, they too are able to extract some benefit. It necessarily enables the conception of disadvantaged groups accessing the LFP sector as potentially active agents in their children’s schooling rather than as passive bystanders.

Households in this study chose LFP focus schools through ideological constructs related to their “mental models” discussed at length elsewhere (Srivastava, 2006). North

(1990) defines mental models as the “pre-existing mental constructs through which they [actors] understand the environment and solve the problems they confront” (p. 20), which are essential to choice-making behavior. The mental models of parents in this study were tied to their beliefs and values about education, perceptions of the different school sectors accessible to them, aspirations for their children’s futures, and economic concerns.

Their choice processes were also related to the particular socio-economic positions that participating households occupied in relation to local school markets. Households in the study viewed the schooling arena as highly marketised, one where every social group “has its place”, and saw the LFP sector targeted to them (Srivastava, 2007). Though deeply considered and systematic, results indicate that their school choice process was not ordered or linear and, very often, the resulting choice of school was not seen as the ‘best’ or a permanent choice, but a workable proposition at that moment in time. An in-depth examination of the school choice processes of participating households follows a brief presentation of their profiles.

HOUSEHOLD PROFILES

Profiles of households in the study are presented in Table 1 in an attempt to understand where they placed in relation to different forms of (dis)advantage: caste, income, occupation, and education level. The majority of households fell under at least one (but generally multiple) forms of (dis)advantage, as well as within the focus schools’ intended target group.

[Table 1 here]

The majority (88%) of the 181 school-aged children in participating households were sent to focus and other LFP schools. The remaining school-aged children went to state (8%) and religious (1%) schools, while 3% were out of school. The most popular choice for households in the study was LFP focus schools, which is undoubtedly related to the fact that all interviewees were from the focus schools themselves. However, what was surprising was the *extent* to which focus schools were accessed.

Given their limited financial resources and low educational status, the assumption was that households in the study would be selective and access the private sector for one child (probably male) (e.g. De et al., 2002; PROBE, 1999; Tilak & Sudarshan, 2001). However, these households chose LFP focus schools for almost all (83%) of their school-aged children; urban households sending 2.35 and rural households sending 2.6 school-aged children to their respective focus school. Furthermore (and surprisingly), they were just as likely to send their daughters to LFP schools as their sons (see Srivastava, 2006 for gender analysis). These findings were not intended to be generalized but to contextualize LFP school choice for households in the study. Given that this was one of the first studies expressly examining LFP school choice processes of disadvantaged groups in India, the results above provide a contra-intuitive context from which to examine the school choice processes of households in the study.

TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF LFP SCHOOL CHOICE

Data indicated that there were prerequisites for school choice, or certain necessary conditions that had to exist for households in the study to make the initial choice to send their children to school at all. These are discussed at length elsewhere (Srivastava, 2006) but can be broadly categorized as: (a) infrastructure (mixed school pool of school types and safe access to school) and (b) prioritizing education (ability to prioritize and mental model shifts). The choice between available sectors and the choice

of a particular LFP school were intertwined with them. In effect, the prerequisites pointed to systemic barriers that may have traditionally blocked disadvantaged households from accessing schooling (e.g. Karlekar, 2000).

To reiterate, the resulting model presents households in the study with mental models favoring the LFP sector through a systemic set of values, beliefs, and perceptions about education, the nature of provision in the two main sectors accessible to them (state and LFP), aspirations for their children, and economic concerns. Choosing LFP schools was particularly significant given households' very limited finances, low education levels, and relative inexperience with formal schooling. Results indicated that households engaged in a dynamic and inter-related process structured by the *macro-level attitudinal factors*, 'perceptions about state and private sectors' and 'beliefs about education and LFP schooling', and the *micro-level contextual factors*, 'information about local school characteristics' and 'constraints' (see Figure 1). For participants, choosing the LFP sector was a multi-faceted process—choosing LFP focus schools was not the automatic result of choosing between available state and LFP schools.

[Figure 1 here]

Having made the prerequisite choice to send their children to school, there were two inter-related levels of choice for the purposes of the study: (1) a macro-level choice of school type: the choice between different sectors (most commonly, state and LFP) and (2) a micro-level choice of specific school: the choice between competing schools in local school markets. While there seemed to be some correlation between the two levels (beyond the scope of the study to ascertain), choosing one sector over the other at a macro-level did not necessarily exclude selecting a school from the other sector, given micro-level assessments of local school markets or constraints. For example, while a

minority, 13 households simultaneously accessed LFP schools and state, religious, or no schools for some of their school-aged children. In effect, the macro-level almost acted as an umbrella through which households took stock of their specific situations, contexts, and needs. The discussion on engagement strategies further below will show that they did not view resulting choices as final and re-evaluated them within a school year.

Macro-Level Attitudinal Factors

Perceptions about the State and Private Sectors

Participants held firm macro-level perceptions about state and private sectors, which were applied to their local contexts in choosing a school. Similar to other studies (Govinda, 2002; Jeffrey, Jeffrey, & Jeffrey, 2005; PROBE, 1999), households generally viewed both sectors as binary opposites, with all private schooling types offering a better quality (however defined) of schooling. One rural father stressed:

The difference between here [the private sector] and there [the state sector] is like that between the ground and the sky. –Ram Dev³

Similar to Ram Dev, many parents asserted that there was “something” inherently different about private sectors that the state sector simply could not match. This somewhat intangible set of qualities was a combination of parents sensing a more conducive climate for schooling and more educational activities in private schools. Interviewees perceived differences between the state and private sectors as deficiencies in the former. They perceived these deficiencies mostly due to the general discourse on schooling in their local communities, and in some cases, through personal experience of both sectors.

Deficiencies in the state sector were attributed to a number of school-related factors, such as: lack of adequate school facilities; short-staffing of teachers; unsanctioned school closures and irregular school staff attendance; inadequate or infrequent

monitoring or school inspections; lack of strict disciplinary procedures for children; an unsupportive and non-responsive school environment for parents; and unreliable teachers and unsatisfactory teaching practices. There is converging evidence in existing literature on many of these points (e.g. Balagopalan & Subrahmanian, 2003; Jabbi & Rajyalaskshmi. 2000; Nambissan & Sedwal, 2001; PROBE, 1999).

Household perceptions about differences between the state and LFP sectors were most deeply ascribed to the attitudes and work practices of teachers, which were largely conceived as negligent and dubious. Many viewed state teachers and their teaching practices with disdain. In more extreme cases, some households expressed a heightened lack of confidence in the state sector, dismissing it as being gravely malfunctioning and rampant of corruption. Among this group, parents (and LFP owners) made allegations that state inspectors did not make regular inspections or accepted *ghoos* (bribes) to pass malfunctioning schools (similar to findings by Tooley & Dixon, 2005). Nonetheless, teachers were blamed as the main culprits, seen as manipulating the state sector by resorting to questionable practices such as transferring from remote postings for personal motives:

There's nothing but deceit and disloyalty in state schools. People sit at home and accumulate their pensions. They don't want to teach.
[...]

Teachers get their postings transferred locally [from rural schools]. They do their household chores... farming and agriculture or business, they do everything. They have no interest in teaching. So two or four children from the local area go just to hang out, they're not the studying type...what difference does it make? Instead of playing at home they go and play at school.

And here in the city, what's the situation in the state schools?

...I've never seen them. Nor do I have any power to go and visit them. [...]

I think that it'll be approximately the same type of environment here as well.

–Alok Kumar, Urban Father

Such perceptions about the state sector were deep-rooted and, as for Alok Kumar, held even if they were not validated in local contexts. In contrast, the LFP sector was generally perceived as being efficient and successful in delivering a satisfactory standard of schooling, mainly because for many, fee charging was seen as a prerequisite for ‘good’ schooling.

Generally, perceptions about the LFP sector were: better school facilities; strict adherence to school calendars and daily timetables; higher class of clientele; higher levels of school responsiveness to specific needs; interested and capable teachers; an environment more conducive to learning; better quality of schooling; and effective school management. Positive perceptions about the LFP sector were related to a feeling that there was some guarantee on the quality of schooling delivered, simply because households paid a fee (no matter how low) which contributed to the school’s very existence. Some parents felt that paying a fee gave them a right to test the claims made by their chosen LFP school, contrary to the state sector.

Households also felt that children attending LFP schools were brighter. For many, this perception was an extension of the belief that private schools were inherently better than state schools. For others, it was due to differences in their children’s results on various tasks and exams. However, it must be stressed that these perceptions were based on school-devised exams or tests and not on comparable or standardized measures. Some parents also felt that judging their children’s progress was difficult because of their own limited or lack of schooling. Nonetheless, the perception held, and the majority of households conceptualized LFP schools as the only viable tools for social mobility, and the most tangible opportunity for a better life:

...I said that it’s been two years since they’ve been studying at the state school and they’re not learning anything and their life is being ruined. Big deal if they’re going [to school], they’re not **learning** anything... [...]

It's the third year now that they're at the private [focus] school. And now however they do, they're going to continue studying in private school. At least they'll learn **something**, they'll be able to make something of their life.

–Champa Devi, Urban Mother

Beliefs about Education and LFP Schooling

The second attitudinal factor concerned households' general beliefs about the necessity of formal education and its role in their children's futures. Most households felt that traditional trades were no longer sustainable, requiring their children to seek formal education for employment in different sectors (see Srivastava, 2006). These beliefs were most expressly attached to the LFP sector, where parents perceived the type of education required in India's changing socio-economic context was available. This was despite their lack of knowledge about the curriculum, and despite LFP schools in the study rigidly following the same curriculum delivered in state schools. Nonetheless, LFP schooling was seen as an essential commodity to acquire a place in the new labor market.

However, they felt that although education (LFP schooling in particular) was necessary, it would not guarantee a job. Some attributed that to fate, while others felt that nepotism or institutionalized corruption stood in the way:

There's no guarantee at all [that they'll find a job]... even those who've passed intermediate [grade 12] roam around empty-handed. But having been educated they can start their own business or trade. It's common practice to give a Rs. 150,000 bribe to get a job somewhere... even as a bank manager or teacher. —Brij Bihari, Rural Father

Some households felt that the benefits of education were curbed after a certain level (junior or high school). For them, the decision to send their children to secondary or post-secondary education was pre-empted from the outset, in favor of setting up small trades. Similar to Jeffrey et al's (2005) account of privatization in Uttar Pradesh, this subgroup of households saw the LFP sector as a commodity, but accessed it for a specific

purpose: to educate their children to an adequate standard in the 3 R's so that they may be self-sufficient in the future.

Beliefs about LFP schooling contributing to self-sufficiency were stressed by parents who claimed that their own lack of education underscored the importance of schooling their children. They specifically conceptualized LFP schooling as promoting self-sufficiency and raising their children's economic socio-economic status, as well as negotiating barriers in everyday life and fostering independence, particularly for their daughters. Similar to other studies (e.g. Jeffrey, 2005; Page, 2005), while many parents acknowledged that girls' education was important for employability, the changing 'marriage market' held relatively more importance (Srivastava, 2006). However, parents believed that accessing the LFP sector for their daughters would increase social mobility by receiving better marriage proposals. In some households, the need for girls' education was contested and choosing the LFP sector was the result of continuous advocacy.

Both macro-level factors were applied to households' specific contexts and were mediated by the micro-level contextual factors, 'local school characteristics' and 'constraints', to choose local LFP focus schools.

Micro-Level Contextual Factors

Information about Local School Characteristics

Since there was an adequately sized pool of potentially accessible state and LFP schools for rural and urban households to choose from⁴, focus schools were not chosen by default. Household choice processes partly relied on gathering information about potential schools on different characteristics, such as: fee structure, fee management practices, teachers' attendance rate, school facilities, school environment, children's results, and medium of instruction. They gathered this information to make a judgment

on the relative quality of different local schools according to their own indicators and mental models.

Their primary and overwhelming sources of information were other parents in the neighborhood or village, family members, and close friends who were considered trustworthy and reasonably informed. The information was largely comprised of their sources' experiences of and general perceptions about focus schools compared with other local schools. Except for a small minority of households that visited focus schools prior to enrolling their children, or who had some direct knowledge by having previously accessed it, most gained something similar to "hot knowledge" (Ball, 2003) by speaking to other parents.

Surprisingly, even though the context and socio-economic status of households in this study were vastly different to middle-class parents in England, they seemed to engage in similar behavior of "chattering" about schools (Ball, 2003). Data indicate that these disadvantaged households engaged in dynamic conversation about local schools, actively sought information about them, and called on each other for 'insider' knowledge. Once the information was collected, it was matched against similar information about other local state and LFP schools and linked back to attitudinal factors. In light of the information, they conducted a sort of cost-benefit analysis on the perceived quality of local schools. For example, even though state schools had the lowest tuition fees and despite their incentives (free textbooks, 3 kg wheat per month/child, and scholarships), households did not feel that these benefits outweighed the costs of what was thought to be an inferior quality of schooling.

Generally, the level of 'goodness' of different school types was perceived to increase as fee levels and English instruction increased. For example, Hindi-medium LFP schools were perceived to be better than state schools, medium-fee English private schools better than Hindi-medium LFP schools, and high-fee English private schools

were perceived as the best. Nonetheless, most households felt that given their budget and available information on the quality of different schools (according to their conceptions of ‘good’ schooling), focus schools were the best ‘value for money’. Most chose LFP focus schools not because they were perceived as the ‘best’ overall choice, but because they were the most workable and accessible to households in the study.

Generally, household conceptions of what constituted a ‘good school’ and ‘good schooling’ at the macro-level held for the micro-level. The relative ‘goodness’ of focus schools was related to certain household-articulated indicators, such as: school popularity indicated by large class sizes and high instances of enrolment from local families; children’s views on their degree of happiness; the practice of fee-charging; English instruction (as a subject even if not English-medium); high promotion rates; good pass rates on school tests and Board exams; regular teachers’ attendance; teachers paying attention to children in class; strict discipline practices; and local parents’ opinions.

Valuing large class sizes may partially explain why the urban focus school’s reputation grew as a ‘good school’ despite the fact that until 2001, when the school’s facilities were extended, average class sizes were 60-70 in cramped conditions. In fact, the owner explained that increased revenues due to jumps in enrolment and increased popularity during this time enabled expansion. In the urban focus school’s experience, stifling conditions and large class sizes prompted even more parents to access it.

High promotion rates were also an important consideration, since households reported that they were the only check they had on the schooling delivered. However, other than students who took board exams, all other assessment was school-based and there were no external criterion-based assessments that could confirm students’ performance. Nonetheless, households did not question whether high promotion rates resulted from student mastery of key concepts or lenient grading criteria. In fact, some case study schools stated that they adopted lenient promotion policies since lower

promotion rates would indicate low learning levels, which would be interpreted by current and potential clients as low quality, and adversely affect popularity. Participants also stressed that focus schools had certain specific characteristics (see Table 2), prompting them to be chosen over competing LFP schools.

[Table 2 here]

Constraints

Unsurprisingly, practical constraints affected households' choice of school. While financial constraints may have been the most acute and pervasive, there were others (see Table 3). Nonetheless, given their limited financial resources, parents explained that this was the primary constraint and often a determining factor in deciding which local school to access. Households reported that they tried finding a local school that matched as many desired school characteristics as possible within their limited budget.

[Table 3 here]

Most of the 13 households that simultaneously accessed focus schools in combination with others claimed it was because of financial constraints. In such cases, some households opted for state schools based on the presumed aptitude of their children. Others, particularly Muslim families, chose lower fee religious schools (*madrasas*). Nonetheless, for most households, focus schools represented a viable option with many desirable school characteristics, while allowing them to manage their constraints. While most parents were satisfied having chosen focus schools, some were concerned that a combination of constraints conspired, restricting their choice to the focus school from some 'ideal' school. For them, even though certain desirable

characteristics were not present in focus schools to the degree that they would have ideally liked, the combination of individual constraints outweighed that concern. As previously mentioned, a common example was choosing focus schools over medium-fee English-medium private schools.

Thus, having been guided by macro-level attitudinal factors to favor the LFP sector households applied them to their specific contexts through micro-level contextual factors, and chose the focus schools for most of their children. However, as the following discussion on engagement strategies will demonstrate, this choice was continually re-evaluated, and for many, did not represent a final or permanent choice.

HOUSEHOLD ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES: DO EXIT, VOICE, AND LOYALTY APPLY?

The increased commodification of schooling in India (Jeffrey et al., 2005) and LFP sector choice in particular necessitates an analysis of patterns of interaction with a consumer orientation. Hirschman's (1970) concepts of exit, voice, and loyalty provide a starting point for thinking about how the introduction of market forces in schooling provision for disadvantaged groups can alter their engagement with the schooling arena. Although the concepts were developed to explain customer or member responses to declining firms or organizations, Hirschman explicitly intended them to be applied to other contexts and frequently used public/private education as an example to illustrate client behavior. Therefore, it is surprising that while the concepts are frequently referred to as generally accepted patterns of behavior regarding school choice, relatively few studies (e.g. Adler & Raab, 1988; Moore, 1990; Willms & Echols, 1992; Matland, 1995; Gordon, 1996) as a proportion of the vast school choice literature have actually used them as explicit bases of analysis.

According to Hirschman (1970), customers or members are likely to use one of two options in response to a decline in the quality of a firm's product or an organization's service:

- (1) Some customers stop buying the firm's products or some members leave the organization: this is the *exit option*. As a result, revenues drop, membership declines, and management is impelled to search for ways and means to correct whatever faults have led to exit.
- (2) The firm's customers or the organization's members express their dissatisfaction directly to the management...through general protest addressed to anyone who cares to listen: this is the *voice option*. As a result, management once again engages in a search for the causes and possible cures of customers' and members' dissatisfaction (emphasis in original) (p.4).

The important distinction is that exit is an economic mechanism and voice, a political one. This distinction has been blurred in some studies that equate exiting to choice (e.g. Ball, 2003, p. 40). In fact, many studies on school choice operationalize 'choosers' as those that have exited their local public school, requested special placements, or participated in voucher programs (e.g. Adler & Raab, 1988; Stevans & Sessions, 2002; Willms & Echols, 1992). The problem with such conceptualizations is that the political mechanism of voice assumes secondary treatment, and parents who stay at their local schools are depicted as 'non-choosers' or disinterested without an analysis of their reasons for staying at a school. There is little indication whether these parents indeed made the choice to *stay* at a particular school because they were actively engaging with voice to make positive changes in it, expressing loyalty, or were what Hirschman describes as "inert clients" who are less quality sensitive.

Loyalty assumes importance in such a discussion. According to Hirschman's (1970) framework: "As a rule...loyalty holds exit at bay and activates voice" (p. 28). He notes that loyalty is most important for organizations that occupy the bottom tier of a

quality spectrum which is densely populated by similar competing organizations. In such a scenario, loyalty can act as a barrier for a number of clients that are likely to exit to a competitor. This seems particularly applicable to LFP schools which are abundant, in fierce competition with one another, and which, in comparative terms, are generally seen as lower quality than other schools in the private sector. However, data from this study show that schools maintained their client base not by inculcating “loyalty and cohesive ideology” (Hirschman, 1970, p. 82), but by actively targeting parents’ financial needs as expressed through the engagement strategies they employed. Results indicated that parents in this study neither used voice to engage with their LFP school politically nor expressed loyalty, but that their immediate concern was to engage economically.

Resulting engagement strategies were quite different from Hirschman’s accepted model. Households used four strategies as part of a spectrum to engage with the LFP sector: *staying*, *fee-bargaining*, *exiting*, and *fee-jumping* depicted in Figure 2. Each strategy indicates varying degrees of decreasing *nesting* at a particular LFP school, where nesting refers to the likelihood of staying at a particular school for a significant length of time. In light of the analysis, this was set at a minimum of beyond one school year.

[Figure 2 here]

Unlike Hirschman’s model, while households exited LFP schools they were only somewhat quality sensitive to even their own indicators above. Strategies with greater degrees of nesting (such as staying) were not related to the “political mechanism of voice” or to loyalty expressed as a commitment to stay. In fact, voice was neither employed nor sought in the traditional sense, and the concept of loyalty inculcating converging ideologies, was non-existent. As the discussion will show, households

established engagement strategies around the “economic mechanism of exit” to an even greater degree than in Hirschman’s analysis.

Staying

The strategy with the highest degree of nesting was termed, *staying*. It was employed by parents who accessed focus schools for at least one year, or who envisioned their children to continue at their chosen school in the immediate future. Although it had the highest degree of nesting compared to the other strategies, staying did not indicate a final choice. For example, it did not preclude the option of exiting if children’s results did not match desired outcomes, even in cases where focus schools were accessed for a number of years.

Households expressed a number of rationales behind staying, which are presented in Table 4. While much of the rationale was related to positive assessments of schools, there were certain instances where it seemed less the result of positive factors.

[Table 4 here]

Staying was sometimes the result of obligation to LFP school owners because of personal relationships, or out of a tradition to access certain schools. This feeling of obligation was stronger in the rural case. For example:

...I mean, you send them here [to the rural focus school] and the children that studied here and failed high school are the ones teaching. So when they themselves don’t have any knowledge, then how are they going to teach? That’s why we can see that our children can’t even speak proper Hindi. But because it’s not good to keep changing schools... that’s why we’re sending them to school here. –Nandu Ram, rural father

Nandu Ram's comment, "it's not good to keep changing schools", was in reference to the perceived strain in his relationship with the owner if he exited. While this degree of obligation was reported by only one interviewee, it seemed an important theoretical distinction as it points to the possibility that staying at a particular school may not be automatically due to quality satisfaction. This is contrary to Hirschman's model and traditional market analyses that continually accessing a school is prompted by loyalty or voice, or indicates satisfaction (e.g. Chubb & Moe, 1990; Tooley, 2000). The sense of personal obligation is not akin to the concept of loyalty in Hirschman's model, as it carries a sense of coercion or unwillingness rather than a commitment to the school.

Data indicate that the strategy to stay may partly have been the result of certain barriers: (1) exhaustion of the local school pool (more acute in rural group); (2) sense of obligation to owners; and (3) the belief (though uncommon) that disruption from moving children between schools was undesirable. Fundamentally, the analysis highlights that staying relied on a mix of rationales and was not necessarily related to quality satisfaction, pointing to the apparent unsuitability of *homo economicus* in this context.

Fee-Bargaining

It was not uncommon for parents to bargain over the amount of tuition fees due. The interaction was not unlike the common practice of bargaining employed by Indian consumers for any good in the market. According to observed practice in case study schools, parents approached the owner/principal and claimed that they could not afford the fees due because of other financial commitments or a lack of earnings. Instead, they presented an amount they could afford, and after some haggling, made a final offer. This offer was slightly higher than the initial amount but always less than the amount due. Nonetheless, owners/principals accepted it, claiming they had no other choice.

Households employed fee-bargaining with the intention of staying, but threatened to exit if the reduced fee amount was not accepted. LFP school owners/principals explained that they conceded to parents' fee-bargaining instead of expelling students for two main reasons: (1) philanthropic motive: claiming it was unfair to deny their students schooling on account of their parents' actions even if they felt parents could afford the full amount and (2) profit motive: pressure to retain clients since they could easily exit to competing LFP schools.

Superficially, fee-bargaining can be seen as a sort of voicing strategy. However, it has quite a different nature. Voice, in the traditional model, implies that parents take action to voice their concerns with the aim of improving school quality for the educational benefit of their children. However, fee-bargaining was only used to voice financial concerns with the aim of reducing financial commitments. This constitutes a fundamental difference between the conceptualization of voice in Hirschman's model as a recuperation mechanism for quality improvement, and here, where it was only used for improving crude efficiency. Moving further along the spectrum towards lower degrees of nesting makes it clearer that Hirschman's model was not applicable here.

Exiting

Households frequently and uninhibitedly employed the strategy to exit LFP schools. What is seen as an extreme strategy in traditional school choice literature was reportedly used by nearly all participants at some time. Enabling exit was the ease of exit and entry in the LFP sector because of the specific operational arrangements that case study schools (like other LFP schools) made (Srivastava, 2007). More tangibly, the schooling pattern of the household in the following example is indicative of the frequency and ease with which exiting was employed.

In the span of three years, one urban household accessed three LFP schools: first a rural LFP school, then an LFP school in another part of the city, and finally the urban focus school. The family did not wait for the end of an academic year to exit a school. In fact, the exits corresponded to their relocation plans rather than the school schedule. They did not encounter difficulties in enrolling their children in any LFP school, even for mid-year enrolments, despite the fact that this was against official enrolment procedures.

The majority of households reported that focus schools were not the first or only schools they had accessed. In fact, although the focus school choice had a higher degree of permanence for most households than previous schools, the decision to exit them was not improbable. For example, one household accessed the urban focus school for all of its six children for eight consecutive years. Yet, the option to exit it were they not satisfied with their children's grades that year was mentioned as the next immediate step. Conversely, households who had previously exited other LFP schools for the focus schools expressed similar reasons. Apart from '*chronic exiters*' who employed fee-jumping (below), in which the prime and perhaps only concern was to access LFP schools without paying, there was a mix of rationales for households who employed exiting (see Table 5). Once again, exiting was not purely a quality sensitive decision as in Hirschman's model.

[Table 5 here]

Fee-Jumping

LFP clients displaying an extreme lack of likelihood to nest employed the *fee-jumping* strategy and were termed 'chronic exiters'. All LFP owners/principals reported that clients frequently exited their schools at the end of a given school year without paying a large proportion of fees due. They claimed that parents "jumped on the fees" at

their school, enrolling their children in another LFP school. According to owners/principals, a certain degree of premeditation was central to this strategy. They felt that chronic exiters would have determined from the outset to pay fees for only a few initial months and exit at the end of the year. This would be repeated at another LFP school the following year.

The success of this strategy hinged on the admission practices of most LFP schools that were contrary to the official rules of admission. The proper course of new enrolments was for the new student to submit a valid school record or 'transfer certificate'. However, in practice, many LFP schools admitted students without it. Owners/principals asserted that it was advantageous for the admitting LFP school to do so. Not only would the school's enrolment increase, it would also collect admission fees (usually double or triple the monthly tuition fee) and at least a few months' fees. The advantage for chronic exiters was that they saved the overdue amount at the old school and on the cost of a full year's fees at the new school. While fee-jumping was the most extreme strategy in the spectrum, owners/principals claimed it was not uncommon.

Owners/principals stressed their powerlessness in dealing with chronic exiters as they did not have much bargaining power because: (1) the threat of withholding transfer certificates in non-board examined years was futile, having little or no effect on admissions to other LFP schools and (2) expelling students was disadvantageous since they hoped to recover some fees as long as parents stayed. It is clear that concepts of loyalty and voice were non-existent in fee-jumping, and that it was used not as a quality recuperation mechanism, but for financial gain.

Factors Contributing to the Success of Engagement Strategies

The success of household engagement strategies, particularly those with low degrees of nesting, lay with the specific nature of the schooling market for disadvantaged

groups and its operational arrangements. Firstly, the mushrooming of LFP schools in urban and rural areas (although fewer in number) changed the landscape of school choice for households that were mainly relegated to one sector—the state. The widespread emergence of LFP schools provided disadvantaged households with a viable alternative to the perceived (and perhaps actual) deterioration of quality in the state sector for the first time. This landmark development allowed them to actively engage in school choice by employing strategies that they felt would benefit their interests.

Secondly, in addition to the increased number and types of accessible schools, the LFP sector's specific operational arrangements (see Srivastava, 2005; 2007) allowed households to employ these strategies uninhibitedly, and with little immediate cost to their children's education. For example, if the formal rule for admitting schools requiring transfer certificates was not over-ridden by shadow rules allowing admissions without them, then households could not employ fee-jumping or exiting with much success. Exiting would not result in immediate entry to another school, having a negative cost to their children's schooling, and possibly acting as a deterrent for chronic exiters.

Finally, while some parents felt that moving children between schools could adversely impact their schooling, this was not a barrier for most, even those employing the strategy to stay. This facilitated the use of engagement strategies with lower degrees of nesting, and partly seemed related to households' lack of engagement with loyalty or voice in the LFP sector.

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

It can be said that active school choice behavior is expected in a group that directly invested in schooling and chose the LFP sector. However, the results challenge traditional assumptions about the schooling choices and behaviors of disadvantaged households in India and nuance the discourse. The complexities of the school choice

processes and the resulting model in this study point to a systemic set of values, beliefs, and mental models which guided these disadvantaged households in enacting their school choices and engaging with their chosen schools. Results show that despite their relative lack of familiarity with formal schooling, disadvantaged households in the study made a deliberate and considered choice, albeit from a different frame of reference. Furthermore, they did not assume the role of “disconnected choosers” (Gewirtz et al., 1995), which would be the expected class-related typology most closely capturing the group in this study. Disconnected choosers are defined as parents who:

...are disconnected from the market in the sense that they are not inclined to engage with it. It is not that these parents have no views about education, or no concerns about schools and their children's achievement. They do, but they do not see their children's enjoyment of school or their educational success as being facilitated in any way by a consumerist approach to school choice (Gewirtz et al., 1995, p. 45).

Households in this study were in fact *convinced* that their children's schooling could be improved only through active engagement with the school market and a consumerist approach to school choice, rather than relying on state provision. In fact, the very nature of the school market facilitated the emergence of an approach to school choice more consumerist than many economically developed countries. However, the process was structured through ideological mental models, where any one of the attitudinal or contextual factors informed the others and could result in reassessing the choice. This poses a challenge to rational assumptions about school choice in exactly the scenario they are assumed to operate—an exceedingly privatized and marketised school arena.

A picture of households considering the choice through ideological or value-based constructs and perceptions that can be influenced by peers and changing socio-economic factors, school popularity and reputation, beliefs about education, aspirations for children's futures, and value-laden perceptions of a failing state sector, emerges.

Furthermore, the fee-bargaining and fee-jumping strategies specific to the LFP sector (and not other private sectors in India), highlights that the specificities of the contextual make-up of particular schooling markets must be considered. Simply implanting client strategies developed in other markets is insufficient for an adequate analysis, since resulting client strategies to engage with chosen schools are themselves contextually derived.

Finally, while traditional arguments for greater choice through marketisation (resulting from affordable privatization or not) hinge on raising the public sector's efficiency and effectiveness (e.g. Chubb & Moe, 1990; Hoxby, 2003; Tooley, 1997; 2000), they do not take into consideration systems where the public sector has no incentive to compete. Hirschman's theory was catalyzed by his observations of the Nigerian railway system, which experienced large exit but did not have the mechanism's desired recuperation effect. This was because its revenue sources were diverse and relied more heavily on state contributions than private ones. This is strikingly similar to Indian public education, which in recent years has received increased funding from international sources through *Education for All* programs without contingencies on quality improvement. Therefore, while the emergence of the LFP sector heralds an important and perhaps even desirable change for the schooling choices of some disadvantaged groups, it also poses a paradox of further deteriorating quality for the public sector, because:

While it is most clearly revealed in the private-public school case, one characteristic is crucial...those customers who care most about the quality of the product and who, therefore, are those who would be the most active, reliable, and creative agents of voice are for that very reason also those who are apparently likely to exit first in case of deterioration (Hirschman, 1970, p. 47).

According to Hirschman’s typology, parents accessing the LFP sector would be classified as the quality-conscious “alert clients” in relation to the competing state sector. This has fundamental implications for the future of children whose parents either cannot or do not access the LFP sector. For if the state sector is as malfunctioning as it is perceived and documented to be, and there is cream-skimming of clients even among disadvantaged groups, the future of schooling for the most disadvantaged does not seem promising. From this perspective, while greater school choice through the LFP sector seems desirable for disadvantaged groups who had little or no choice before, it may also be highly iniquitous if it has no recuperation effect for the state sector.

Endnotes

¹ Private unaided schools are financially independent of the state, and can be recognised or unrecognised. This is in contrast to private-aided schools that are privately managed but heavily funded (up to 95 percent of a school’s budget) through state grant-in-aid.

² There may be some state variations. This does not hold for government schools run by central departments for specific groups. For example, a small number of schools are run by the Department of Tribal Welfare (for tribal groups), the Ministry of Defence (*sainik* schools), and Ministry of Social Justice (for children with disabilities).

³ All names are pseudonyms. All interview excerpts are translated from the original in Hindi.

⁴ Rural households had a total of six schools (three state and three LFP) they could choose from. Due to the large number of LFP schools in the vicinity of the focus school, the size of the urban school pool is indeterminate. However, the urban focus school received direct competition from four other LFP schools and two state schools on the same block.

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**Table Error! Main Document Only.
Profiles of Households in the Study**

Caste	55 percent belonged to Other Backward Caste or Scheduled Caste groups (ranked as the lowest official caste groups in India)
Household Income	80 percent earned below the minimum annual taxable income of Rs. 50,000 Rural mean: Rs. 26,108 (excluding outlier) Urban mean: Rs. 41,768
Parents' Occupation	83 percent Mothers: Housewives (of those who worked all but 3 engaged in domestic or manual labour) 84 percent Fathers: Manual labour, small farming, or low skilled jobs
Parents' Educational Level	51 percent parents had no formal education or only some primary schooling 58 percent urban mothers and 53 percent rural mothers: no schooling
School-aged Children per Household	Urban households: 2.87 Rural households: 3.06

Note: The sample was not intended to be representative. It constituted 10% of the total number of households accessing LFP focus schools.

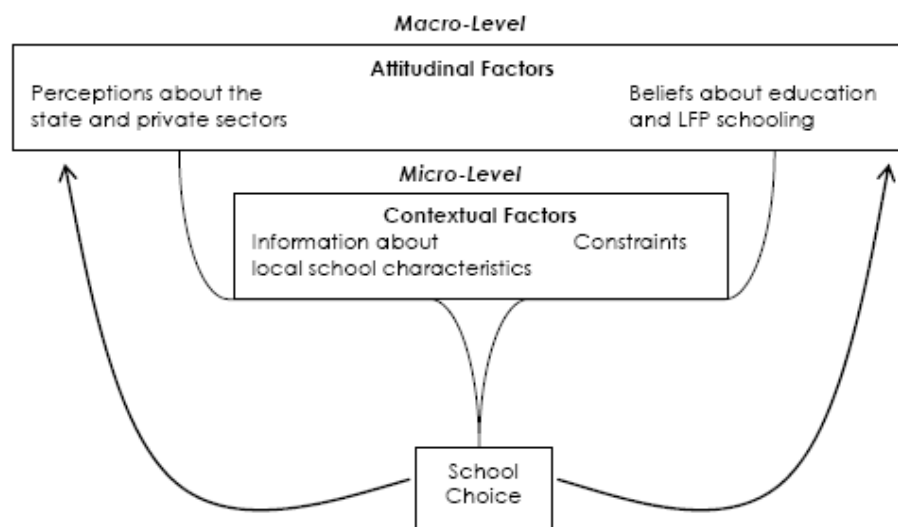


Figure 1 Attitudinal and Contextual Factors of Household LFP School Choice Process

Note: The model outlines the process employed by households guiding their choice of LFP focus schools, and not previous or subsequent choices.

Table 2
Specific Focus School Characteristics

Focus School Characteristic	Participant Articulations
Fee Concessions	Greater fee concessions making focus schools more affordable.
Flexible Fee Collection Practices	More flexibility in the timing and amount of fees to be paid compared to other LFP schools in area.
Convenience	Location of the school in the centre of the village or neighbourhood and proximity to homes. The ability of children to go to school in groups without adult escorts. This was seen as a factor addressing issues of safety for children, <i>parda</i> for mothers in the village, and causing limited disruption to parents' daily work schedules.
'Home Grown' School (rural group only)	Personal connection with the school because unlike the other competing LFP schools, it was owned and run by a villager.
Higher Status Clientele (perceived)	Socio-economic status and educational awareness of parents at the focus school thought to be higher than state schools. As there was no way for households to check this comparatively, and as data indicate that there was a large proportion of lower caste children at both schools, this is presented as a perceived characteristic.

Table 3
Constraints Affecting School Choice as LFP Focus Schools

Constraint	Participant Articulations
Financial	Household income inadequate to meet high schooling costs given low income levels, family size, and competing needs
Location of School	Certain 'ideal' schools too far which would add to daily transport costs; distance of school too great to be deemed as a safe choice for children to navigate alone (more acute in rural group)
Personal Relationship with Principal	A sense of obligation to choose a school because of personal relationships with the principal and school management
Additional School Expenses	Too many 'hidden' costs of schooling: registration fees, exam fees, books and school supplies, school activity fees, uniforms, private tuition all which added increase financial input of schooling
Child's Choice	Household compliance with child's wish not to attend a particular school
Fee Amounts and Collection Practices	Higher fees, fewer concessions, and inflexible fee collection practices at 'ideal choice'

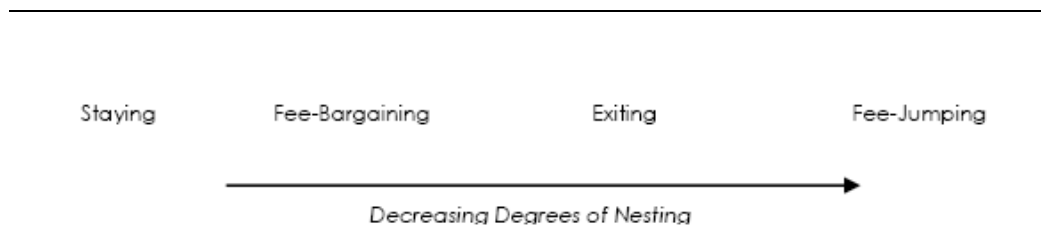


Figure 2 Spectrum of Household Engagement Strategies by Decreasing Degrees of Nesting

Table 4
Set of Rationales behind Employing the Strategy to Stay

Rationale	Explanation
Curricular	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satisfied with children's results • Housed all grades in the same school (KG through to grade 12)
Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable fees • 'Flexi-fees': flexible fee paying arrangements
Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have had enough experience of the school to assess its claims of 'good schooling' • Believe that school earned its reputation • Feel obliged to stay because of long association • Do not wish to disrupt children's schooling
School Management Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High level of school responsiveness • Enforcement of school calendar and timings • Strict with children
Other School Related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity • Satisfactory facilities
<i>Household Related</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family tradition • Children wanted to continue attending

Table 5
Rationales for Employing the Strategy to Exit

Rationale	Elaboration
Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fees too high • Frequent demands for additional school activity fees • Perceive that quality of schooling is not comparable to fees charged (i.e. not getting 'value for money')
Popularity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notion that the school was not popular • Assumption that small class sizes indicated that the school was 'not good' because it was not bought into by many clients
Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate school facilities
Curricular	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not satisfied with children's results • Perception that not much schooling took place • Amount of English instruction
School Management Practices & School Administration Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low level of school responsiveness • Lack of trust in the school management staff • Not much flexibility in fee payments
Household Related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relocated from rural to urban areas or neighbourhoods within the city • Child did not want to attend